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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISTANBUL 002105

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SUBJECT: URBANCIC AND BASER DISCUSS EFFORTS TO COMBAT PKK

REF: ANKARA 6496

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. S/CT Deputy Coordinator Urbancic met Gen. (ret) Baser, the GOT's counter-PKK envoy, in Istanbul on November 11. After expressing appreciation for Urbancic's efforts to curb PKK criminal support in Europe, which was the subject of Urbancic's Ankara meetings, Baser took the opportunity to describe the often hostile media environment in which he and his U.S. counterpart, Gen. (ret) Ralston, must operate. The group also discussed discrete areas - extradition, smuggling - where more cooperation might be useful. Baser agreed to meet with his Iraqi counterpart, State Minister al-Waili, but categorically refused to meet with anyone "chosen by Barzani." Baser also complained about recent statements made in Washington by a senior U.S. military official, which he claimed incorrectly characterized the GOT position. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) S/CT Deputy Coordinator Frank Urbancic and EUR/SE Director Doug Silliman met General (ret) Edip Baser, the Turkish counter-PKK Coordinator, on November 11 in Istanbul to discuss ways in which the USG can work with the Government of Turkey (GOT) to reduce and eliminate PKK fundraising and other activities in Europe. Baser was accompanied by MFA Chief of Section for Security Affairs Ceren Etiz. Zack Rothschild, S/CT, Suzanne Hayden, Resident Legal Advisor Ankara, and Sandra Oudkirk, notetaker, rounded out the group.

[1](#)3. (C) The meeting began with a presentation by the U.S. side of the same points covered in their Ankara meetings (septel.) Baser stressed the importance of working against the PKK's propaganda establishment and financing and told the group he was glad the USG was thinking along the same lines. Fighting terrorism is not just an issue for the security forces. The problems are legal, political, and financial as well as propaganda. Without cutting off those lines of support, we can never finish terrorism, he argued.

Turkish Public Opinion

[1](#)4. (C) Baser noted the extremely high level of sensitivity in Turkish public opinion following the Iraq invasion and March

1 vote. He explained the general intellectual view, which he shares, is that the decision to go into Iraq was wrong. He believes that a majority of Turks are pessimistic and suspect ulterior motives in any U.S. offers of assistance. He has discussed this with Gen Ralston and believes that their role is two-fold: first to do something about the PKK and in doing so to improve US-Turkish relations. Public opinion demands results, he argued. Some sort of concrete action such as arrests or handover of leaders is necessary to answer the question "Why can't the most powerful nation on earth do something about the PKK leaders in Northern Iraq?" Media interviews of senior PKK leaders in Iraq were particularly aggravating to public opinion, he stressed. He explained that he would feel more comfortable working this issue if Turkish public opinion were more confident. He argued that success in combating the PKK would give the world proof that international cooperation on counter-terrorism really works. Success would go far beyond the PKK.

15. (C) Baser complained that European countries do not treat PKK terrorism with the same level of seriousness that the U.S. does. He explained that the Turks expect the Europeans to help Turkey fight the PKK in the same way Turkey helped Europe by being a bulwark against the Soviets during the cold war. When the Europeans fail to live up to these expectations it creates problems. Silliman explained that the USG hoped that the intent and willingness of some European governments to act, as described in the U.S. presentation, would result in action in the mid-term including arrests and prosecutions. Silliman explained our effort to link the PKK with criminality in Europe as well as with terrorism in Turkey. This may help to change European

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public opinion.

Baser Complaints Regarding Washington Institute Comments

16. (C) Baser raised comments made by a senior U.S. military officials at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Baser claimed the official made points that contradicted Baser's agreement with Ralston, in particular the official ascribed to the TGS the belief that the PKK "cannot be totally eliminated." Baser argued that the GOT aims to totally end terrorism and the PKK -- underscoring this "would not mean we kill every PKK cadre." He noted that this does not mean that the only solution will be military, but the GOT will not take any steps forward until the PKK disarms and hands itself over to Turkish security forces. From then on the Turkish legal system will handle individuals on a case by case basis, with most expected to be returned to their villages. This already happens with some frequency, he explained. PKK members surrender, their case files are reviewed and the courts decide to release or convict. The GOT even offers some support to PKK defectors. The GOT must handle all terrorists in this way, we cannot go around our legal system, he argued. Baser also criticized the official for referring to "limits to a general amnesty" - an amnesty is not on the table, it has never been mentioned on behalf of the GOT. This is in fact Talabani's idea, argued MFA representative Etiz.

17. (C) Baser also criticized the official for referring to "incentives." EUR/SE Director Silliman jumped in at this point to clarify a point on incentives. He explained the USG has encouraged the GOT to provide incentives for Turkish Kurds living in Northern Iraq (i.e. at Makhmour) to come back to Turkey. The USG is not suggesting the GOT should provide incentives to the PKK. However, in the long run, Silliman suggested that in order to meet its goals the Turkish government may not want to take the concept of incentives off the table. Urbancic made it very clear that the US has very good, direct relations with the GOT and we will not make policy at the Washington Institute, this is simply not how we work with the GOT. Urbancic reiterated our policy of no

compromise with terrorists and no negotiations. We believe in eradicating terrorism. However, he noted that we have a deficit in Turkish public opinion dating back to the invasion of Iraq and cannot minimize this. Our efforts in Europe are a supplement not a substitute

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Military Service, Citizenship and the Failure to Extradite

¶8. (C) Urbancic asked whether the Turkish Kurds who have evaded military service and lost their citizenship could be given some sort of travel document so that they could be brought to trial in Turkey. Turkish law deprives those who reside abroad and evade their military service of their citizenship. As a result, some PKK cadres of Turkish origin cannot be extradited to Turkey because they are no longer Turkish citizens and do not possess the requisite travel documents. There is one such case in the U.S. and about 65 in Germany. Etiz clarified that citizenship was not stripped on the basis of Kurdish ethnicity but because of a failure to complete military service. Silliman pressed the point noting that if what public opinion needs is an arrest or extradition, Turkey could issue passports to these detainees and prosecute them in Turkey. Etiz acknowledged the point, and mentioned that MFA was in discussions with the Turkish Chief of Staff on the matter, and that legislation is under consideration to permit such extraditions.

Counterfeit Cigarettes

¶9. (C) Baser raised the issue of counterfeit cigarettes, Marlboro as well as other brands, being produced in Northern Iraq. He asserted the sales of these cigarettes helps fund PKK activities. He also said that Gen Ralston had told him

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that Roj TV was pirating a couple of U.S. programs. Ankara Resident Legal Advisor Hayden indicated that she would very much like to work the smuggled cigarettes issue with the GOT from a terrorism financing/money laundering aspect. She has personal experience working with Philip Morris investigators in very difficult circumstances (North Korea) and they are very professional.

Al-Waili Meeting

¶10. (C) Silliman asked whether Baser would be willing to meet Iraqi State Minister al-Waili when he is in Ankara during the Al-Maliki visit. Baser indicated that he would be going to Ankara for the 11/15-16 visit and was prepared to meet al-Waili. Baser noted however, that the Iraqi central government lacks authority in Northern Iraq. As a result there is a need to manage expectations with regard to what the Iraqis can and cannot do vis-a-vis the PKK. Silliman noted that the Iraqi central government has authority but not ability. Baser reiterated his willingness to meet al-Waili but said he would not meet anyone chosen by Barzani. The PKK is too deeply embedded in Northern Iraq --- a TV station owned by Barzani recently broadcast an hour-long interview with Karayilan, he noted. Silliman responded that the USG has tried to convince Barzani and Talabani that the PKK is also a problem for them.

Comment

¶12. (C) This meeting was significant in that it brought the U.S. team's message directly to an influential member of the secularist "old guard" who has a personal interest in working with the Europeans as well as the USG in combating the PKK as a result of his role as the GOT-designated counter-PKK coordinator. He seemed mollified by Urbancic's general response to his complaint regarding the Washington Institute

comments. We are working with Washington to respond to the substance of his complaints. End Comment.

S/CT Urbancic and EUR/SE Silliman cleared this message.
JONES